



Pentecost

THE NEW SHOFAR

We do not need a new Pentecost event.

We need to use the gifts with which we are already empowered.

Pentecost celebrates the empowering of a new world

In today's world, the idea of the reality of sin is often downplayed. However, those who minimise its impact on the lives of our human community contribute to the decline in the moral standing of our society as a whole. Sin corrupts our own lives as well as those of the communities in which we are living. If we were to read the Bible we would find how it gives clear examples of the consequences of sin, with one good example being the story of the Tower of Babel. It is a story of pride, of people seeking to *make a name for themselves* by building a tower up to the sky in order to reach God. They overreached in their attempts to place themselves on an equal footing with God. They rejected the idea of living under divine rule. However, understanding the dangers of rampant individualism, the deification of the "I" and the abandoning of our responsibility for others, God turned against them. He scattered the people over the earth, resulting in confusion of languages and ultimately division between peoples. As cooperation and communication between people gets lost in the process, so also is lost communion with God.

The miracle of Pentecost is the opposite of the Babel story, the divine healing of the wound caused by human arrogance and selfishness. At Pentecost people of diverse tongues unite. They come to realize how they are in essence equal to each other, meaning everyone is eligible for receiving life in God and of being in communion with God and one another. Pentecost is the outflowing of the saving life made real for us in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ as had been promised by God from the time of the patriarchs and prophets.

Pentecost is a gift to the world and not just individuals

At the Pentecost event, we do not find accounts of individual disciples being transformed and enlivened. It is a community of believers that is touched by the Holy Spirit. Each of these can still be distinguished; they do not lose personal identity. And yet, more profound than what happened to the individual disciples is the breath-taking identity coming from the flames bathing them all in divine grace.

This does not come as a surprise to readers of Luke's Gospel. That evangelist highlights the way God's saving works in the sending of His Son were directed to the formation of a *people*, not merely the salvation of individuals. Jesus set about forming a new community, one that became a visible reality after Pentecost.

With the outpouring of the Spirit, thousands of new believers are added to the original nucleus, and the community in Jerusalem takes on a distinctive form of life, one at odds with the priorities of the world in which they were to live the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Accordingly, in the church's common life we see the first fruits of the mission Jesus announced in **Luke 4:16-21**: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,¹⁹ to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*” In the gift of the Pentecost Spirit, the Church is empowered, galvanised, and anointed to live out these missionary goals the Father had given to the Son.

Pentecost remains a feast for the Church today

Our celebration of Pentecost is not simply a commemoration of a past outpouring of the Spirit. What we should be celebrating is what the feast confers upon us as a community of believers. We should not forget how the gift of the Spirit is a call to grow in a genuine concern for the most vulnerable among us – a passion for the sufferings of a world in need of Good News of God's saving love. It is about whether we prioritise our individual journey in faith or the flourishing of our community. It is a feast that renews the meaning to the liturgical proclamation: *in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, forever and ever.* God's glory is proclaimed when the faithful gather in obedience to live under divine rule.

We are a Pentecost People bringing God's gifts to the world

Our Easter season concludes on Pentecost Sunday. However, we are called to carry forward the resurrection into our common life, one that is not merely dotted by the Spirit but consumed by it to the point that we might say, there is no “I” in Pentecost.

As Christians we believe that salvation history culminates in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God's son we acknowledge as the Redeemer of the human race. We also believe that all the promises made by Jesus during his public ministry are fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples so that they could go forth and bear witness to the mystery of life and salvation in God.

The consequences of sin, the divisions that exist between people are still present in our world, **but** the real possibility of overcoming them and living a new life in Christ are to be found and experienced in the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Pentecost reminds followers of Jesus that we are not in the world to merely hold religious services. We are in the world to communicate the message that God's powerful love redeems people from sinful situations and systems; to illustrate the way God's love empowers us to build bridges of reconciliation between people who have been estranged by oppression, mistrust, and other factors. Pentecost empowers us to give witness to the way God's love offers healing and inclusion to those who are vulnerable and marginalised. We are not in the world to be spectators.

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